

## **INDIAN WOMAN'S JOURNEY FROM TRADITIONAL LIFE TO MODERNIZED LIFE IN THE NOVEL SOCIALITE EVENING**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Shoba De as a writer is God gifted with an extra-ordinary ability to discuss very sensitive aspects of human life fact fully. Being feminist, De's novels raise a strong protest against the male dominated Indian society where women are oppressed and forced to live life as per the traditions established by the patriarchal society. No doubt, some women of 21<sup>st</sup> century are bold enough to step ahead crushing the established traditional values for women. But they are a few in numbers. The more pathetic is most of such women are not respected and treated as the common women. They are also known as rebellion. Observing the real social situation on ground level, there is a possibility of getting a masked woman who has been living differently with her bold image shown on the surface level. Any way we may say that the situation has been changing very fast. Now the question is – Is it far better than the past? If yes, how and if no, what is the side effects of the modernization of the society, and due to it a very few woman badly carrying woman consciousness values?

**KEYWORDS:** Indian Woman's Journey From Traditional Life, Modernized Life, Novel Socialite Evening

### **INTRODUCTION**

De is indeed one of the most absorbing novelists writing today not only in India, but all over the world. She reacts against the male culture and strongly detests the marginalization of women. She likes to show the other side of a career making Indian women in film or modeling industry and their physical, mental and emotional blackmailing and exploitation by the male section of the fields and sometimes by too bold and vicious natured women themselves. She presents the abnormality of the filmdom, eccentric and sometimes, the selfish behaviors of the stars, nothing escapes her. She says, "Man has subjugated woman to his will, used her as a means to promote his selfish qualification to minister to his sensual pleasure, to be instrument in promoting his comfort." De destroys this distorted and deteriorated image of woman and therefore, the female characters in her novels appear more powerful, bold and as if explosive atom bomb. Besides all, De's women are sexually liberated too. Perhaps, the side effect of it is demoralized young generation. Such women cannot concentrate on bringing up their children. They do not hesitate to use sex as a strategy for social and financial benefits. Marriage for them is just a matter of convenience or prestige, completely devoid of an emotional attachment. Sometimes we feel that their relations are maintained with mutual understanding of free sex. In her novel we could also find out homogeneous or lesbian relation even in the presence of the spouse which is totally intolerable, the worst example of modern deteriorated society of the film or modeling industry in which the characters have been living as if abnormal sex oriented human beings.

Her first novel *Socialite Evening* is very modern in depicting the social mania of the commercial world in a very frank and straight forward way. Sex plays a very vital role in the fictional world of Shobha De. It analyses the various

aspects of sex, a great urge of human beings. Almost all kind of people are interested in it. Our Indian women were very shy in the past; still most of the women are shy in expressing themselves on it. De's women seem too bold in enjoying sex. They enjoy the life as if they are men. It's our tragedy and pathetic situation of our society that in many cases such relations and sometimes involved women are more publicized and criticized by social media and when such happens, even today, women have to suffer a lot in comparison to men of the same society.

Socialite Evenings is the novel which gives wide exposure to the westernized Indian women, particularly of Bollywood. Leading character Karuna, begins writing her memories. As the story moves on, we see how the middle class girl metamorphoses into a star and in this process the dehumanized persons in large and humanized at the toe she comes across. Second one is the eye-catching, bold and space consuming lady character Anjali whose first impression is as a man hungry woman. But as the novel moves on, if you go through the thorough character-outer and inner, Anjali will be found as a pathetic and real character. Perhaps for her extra marital relationship, her husband himself is responsible. Third lady character is Ritu. At the first sight she seems gorgeous, but as the story strings onward, you come to know that how she is exploited by her own husband, how she is left in a terrific and pathetic situation in the presence of the party enjoying members at Anjali's home. Fourth female character of the novel is Krish's wife who is so vicious, cunning and like black spot in the world of the women. She helps her husband to exploit women metrically and physically keeping extra-marital relationship. Girish is somehow better than the other male characters. He is found in search of a perfect Shakuntalla. Varun is a high profile editor who plays a wild game with Karuna breaking his promise not to publish Karuna's photo half naked in his magazine without thinking about her image at her home or in the society. In the society people are used to see the males may be half-naked or females of such class. Such women from the common family would not be able to see her picture on the cover page of any magazine. People laugh at them. Sometimes such girls' family members are led to suicide.

### **Male Domination**

Through many event depictions, De tries to reveal the mean mentality of the mean minded males. Anjali, at the age of 19 though belongs to conservative Jain family marries Abbas- 'Abe'. They met before on a flight when she had joined Air India as an air hostess like other attractive girls of her generation. Abe had been years older at that time. He was an experienced rake with a wild reputation. He was attracted towards the frigid demeanor. Initially, he had imagined, "She would be just another quick pic-up."<sup>12</sup>

Even in the family establishment, children were left out by their mother as they had to give priority to their children's fathers. Karuna tells, "Mother was preoccupied with what to cook for father's dinner. It never mattered what the children's preferences were..... Mother gave father priority, whether it was at mealtimes or anytime else. Farther for anything did not speak directly to the children. Anything he wanted or said was always routed through mother except when the children's transgressions required chastising. Then punishment was swift and direct. He always keep distance because he was a father. Mother expected to handle the other situation or take care of the children. But she has no power to take any decision for her children. Father always rules over them. Once Karuna asks her mother about her interest to shape her career in modeling, mother answers her, "Hasn't your father already got angry with you for those ads you appeared in? I will not take any responsibility for this. You tell him. Don't involve me. Later he will blame me if anything happens."<sup>13</sup> Karuna says, "But that wasn't new. He always blamed her for the children's mistakes."<sup>13</sup> It reveals the general mentality of the supremo of any family. In most of the cases mothers are always blamed for the misbehavior or misdeed of their children. If the children do something good, the fathers will take the whole credit on their own shoulders. Karuna's father

always utters. ‘A person must have discipline and regular habits’. Karuna dislikes this because for him it meant just one thing-regimentation. Lights off at 10 p.m. Up at 5.30. No eating between meals. ‘No idle talk’ over the telephone and no unnecessary laughter. For Karuna, it was like being in the bloody army. She could not understand, “How can he decide which laughter is necessary or unnecessary?”<sup>18</sup> It means the father never behaved friendly with their children. Always distance was kept. Not only this, the children were not even given freedom for the future career. That too was decided by him like, “One daughter shall become a lawyer. One daughter shall qualify as a teacher. And one shall be an IAS officer”.<sup>18</sup> If father was busy with his work not a single member of the house was allowed to interfere. Her father was an autocrat. He believed it wasn’t manly to show his feelings. Karuna and her two sisters never sat in Father’s lap.

In the world women are not allowed to live peaceful life alone without a male partner. As the situation is established in such a way, if she will try to live, she will be pin-pointed and doubted by the society members. When Anjali talks about the rough behavior of her husband, Karuna asks her to live on her own ways. Anjali says, “I can’t ...I am not strong enough. I will die if I have to face the world alone without a man by my side”. Women have to carry their marriage life if they are satisfied with their husbands or not. Karuna says, “My friends were stuck with similar husbands. I guess that made us all feel better. We often discussed them and agreed what bores the lot of them was... We were an exhausted generation of wives with no dreams left. Like our mothers before us, despite the pretensions. Of our unmarried youth, we concentrated on the lives of our growing children.” She further adds, “All the husbands of my friends... They were not evil men, but what they did to our lives went beyond evil. We were reduced to being marginal people. Karuna says, “It was taken for granted that our needs were secondary to theirs, And that in some way we ought to be grateful for having a roof over our heads and four square meals a day.”<sup>69</sup> Earning women were not accepted or liked. Such women’s insistence on working and contributing to the running expenses of the house, many times becomes a battleground. According to Anjali, “Men just feel terribly threatened by self-sufficient women. They prefer girls like me-dependent dolls. We make them feel like heroes and saviors. You should try it- see how much more you will be able to get out of him that way.’<sup>69</sup> But Karuna does not agree with her. She says. “I left him (her husband) alone and I hoped he would leave me alone. I felt like an indifferent boarder in the house, going through the motions of house-keeping and playing wife but the resentment and rebellion remained just under the surface, ready to break out at the smallest provocation.” Karuna’s this disliking presents most of the earning women’s situation in the society. Whatever she is, she has to maintain her all the duties, with this no compromise. The expectation of family members and society from such women has been increasing day by day.

In this novel we see that Karuna’s expectation from her husband is very common and expected. Each wife would like real talk with her husband. She wanted someone mature, sensitive, intelligent, funny and sympathetic.

The novel also presents the traditional patriarchal beliefs of the society even in the period of social media. Karuna’s father tells, “Parents do not go and sit around in their daughters homes”.<sup>106</sup> So their visits were reserved for ceremonial occasions like Diwali. And these were very formal affairs. The husbands are not some of those men who marry the whole family along with the daughter. Being reserved Karuna’s husband doesn’t have much to say to any one, and even less to her parents. He maintains formally cordial relations.

### **Women Consciousness**

In this novel we could find out that all the lady character try to be bold having strong image of themselves to face the male they came across or with whom they have been continuing their life. Almost all lady characters/ protagonists in the novel are found hurt because of the males they came into contact. Once, Karuna tells her husband about the bad words

used by the wives of his friends in a party that she should give off predatory signals and stop hanging around their husbands. On response he says, "Of Course, they are right. Why do you come and join us every time? What do you want to do? Cut us off from and join us every time? Why can't you be like other wives?"<sup>83</sup> This last sentence is most telling. She thinks that she could not be like other wives and doesn't like to be and that night she decided to stop pretending that everything is fine to herself at any rate. Once Karuna and her husband were dressing to go somewhere, she was dressing herself as she likes. At that time her husband tells her, "You want to go out with me dressed in that? You'll look like a sweeper women!"<sup>83</sup> She boldly replies him, "I want to wear this for a change. I hate wearing all those saris and listening to this her husband says that that means she doesn't wish to look like other wives. She likes to be different to others. Not only this, he adds that doing this she is upsetting him. Listening to this Karuna is tempted to ask him about his attitudes-'What about all those things he did that upset me? What about his insensitivity and, yes, defiance? What about the nauseating trench of stale cigarettes and the stomach turning smell of whisky combined with oily tandoori food? What about my revulsion over his horrible safari suits or my anger at the gum he constantly chewed? What about his manners in bed, the loud belches in by face?"<sup>83</sup> She thinks if she tells all these things, he may say that he would relax in his own room. She again murmurs that she will say, "No, you can't I'd want to scream. Do I ever bleach my face in your presence? Do you catch me shaving my legs? Do you find used tampons in the bathroom or chum-stained panties on the floor? If I can be considerate enough to spare you these unsightly 'woman' things-why can't you be equally sensitive?"<sup>83</sup> But just again immediately she thinks again if she would say these all to him, he will mock at her so she decides to keep clam and mum. She says, "And I had learnt to switch off. Switch off. Switch off. Switch off. Switch off. But I didn't want to any more. I didn't want to deaden myself to life."<sup>84</sup> Thus her conscious is churning her mind and heart for 24 hours. It means that she is not satisfied with her husband.

Once Ritu came to Karuna's home and when after that she told Karuna that she didn't think her home as her own. On asking the reason, Ritu again told "Easy, look at your bedroom. Nobody would guess a woman also lives there. It's a man room- your husbands' room. You merely park yourself in it, because you have no place else to go". These few sentences mean that after marriage there is no vacant room for her where she can go and stay upto she gets free from her sorrow. When she further told, "You aren't happy. And you feel trapped," Karuna felt annoyed but besides all she was embraced and angry at Ritu and murmured, "Had I become so transparent? So obvious? I thought I had my masks so perfectly molded. If she, a stranger, could tell so much, so soon-what about others?"<sup>85</sup> This quotes very well represent that whatever the field it may be- household, modeling, social media or so on, but women are found in mask. You will never come to know their real 'HANSI' (happiness, smile) on their face. It can be judged by the following quote by Ritu, "Don't worry.... Your mask is perfect. It's just that I recognized it instantly since I wear an identical one myself."<sup>85</sup>

The protagonist, Karuna too presents the differences of the most of the husband found after marriages while dealing with their wives. Once Karuna says, "It was worse when I tried to share any of my thoughts with him. He used to tell, 'Not now, I am reading', or 'Not now. I am watching T.V', or 'Not now, I have got important business problems.' Then When? I'd seethe. Soon it became never. I just stopped wanting to share anything with him. Initially, I felt stifled by this lack of communications. I used to experience a sensation not unlike physical suffocation. I'd start to choke and turn pale."<sup>88</sup> As she is aware of her right of being a wife to him initially Karuna suffers a lot. After sometimes, due to this, she reaches to a stage of irritation towards him even for his action or thought. She feels totally bored with such husband. Almost all the husbands described here are of such category. They are quite indifferent to their wives. They do many things for their likings but on asking something by their wives they response as if they are planning everything eg. Outing like

events to please their wives. If Karuna expresses her resentment, he asks, "Do you have better alternatives, wifey?" Frankly, she didn't. But she had her books and her fantasies. She is happy-enough with those. She also had the phone and her new girl-friends. Listening to this, he again asks, 'Don't you get bored sitting in the house all day? I plan our evenings just for you. You need an outing'.<sup>89</sup> When Karuna listens to this, she likes to response as she doesn't like such idiotic outings-planned as per the liking and taste of himself only, because she has to wear the sari approved by her mother-in-law. All the husbands depicted here are pretentious.

As the women depicted here are full of women consciousness they could easily find out the hypocrisy of males. They want to have sex with female, but that according to their wishes. Nisha tells the other lady character that she was invited for DK's bed but he insisted, "I like to see you in white saree and with a big tikka on your forehead. Then I imagine I'm screwing a devi and not the 'pros' you are".<sup>103</sup>

### **Depiction of Modern Womans' Mentality**

Shobha Day is very much popular for her trend of the depiction of the modern mentality of the modern women. They seem too bold to be handled. Their mentality is quite contrary to the traditional image of submissive and mild women. In chapter 9 we can see it when Karuna is busy with her mother talking round about the role of kids in divorce. Karuna says her mother, "its good thing she didn't have children. The children always come off the worst in a divorce".<sup>106</sup> Listening to this when her mother says her, 'well I hope you'll have one soon,' she replies, "Mother, we have been over this before. I don't want children and neither does my husband.... I don't want children, I don't like children... electrolysis is cheaper than children".<sup>106</sup> this few sentences reveals how the career oriented or modern minded women react towards motherhood. They have no feelings to it. They don't want to carry the responsibility for bringing up and settling them. For them children are worthless responsibility and wastage of time.

They like to be respected by the male section of the society. Anjali tells Karuna while describing her life narration with Kumar, "This was the first time a man was treating me like a decent woman."<sup>125</sup> These few words show that how the crushed women are awaiting so badly to be honoured and respected by the males.

Modern women like to settle their bank account themselves. If they are given this freedom, we can see that they enjoy the little stuff they have. This is well revealed through Anjali's quote. "We have a joint account which I operate. I draw from it whenever I require cash. He gives me the house-keeping money at the beginning of each month. If I run out, I show him the accounts and he supplements it. I'm supposed to buy my own stuff out of this- the smaller things like saris, bags, shoes. But if there is a major piece of Jwellery to be bought he clears it".<sup>142</sup>

When Anjali talks about her daughter Mini's career to Karuna, Anjali reveals herself as quite professional too. She says 'I'm becoming very professional my dear. I have hired Abe's old tax consultants to help me sort out all the money angels. Abe had given me enough after the talaq-that's been invested too'.<sup>143</sup> She again tells her, 'Mini prefers living abroad, and has decided to go back to school and take courses.... She is keen to earn her own-though she doesn't need to. But I encourage her 'A woman has to be self-sufficient these days'.

Modern women don't believe in 'Pati Parmeshver', worshipping their husbands. Once when Karuna decides to leave Anjali's home in the very late evening Anjali denies, Karuna decides to stay there. She says, "I knew I'd be inviting the husband's wrath, but I decided to stay". This small sentence reveals the courageous nature of modern woman.

If she is not satisfied with her husband, she will look for another man without hesitation. Here De has tried to depict this too. Once Karuna says to Anjali 'I'm feeling worthless. I want to do something useful.... I'm looking for an alternative life. Anjali says "You mean another husband-why don't you just say that? Thought of putting in an ad? Let's work out something naughty for the classifieds-just for the heck of it.... Are you coming to the Patels? May be you'll find a husband there".<sup>204</sup> Modernized women is so courageous, bold and quick decision taker, sometimes without thinking about its consequences or having farsightedness. In this novel one more outstanding character Ritu falls in this category. She becomes ready to be thirty fourth wife of a smuggler. When Anjali tells her that she took wrong steps, she says, "I feel I have taken my first major step- whatever the consequences. May be Gul will get rid of me when he finds someone else, someone younger, but right now, I'm confident and I'm happy".<sup>206</sup> On more asking by Anjali, she justifies her step by saying that like this often happened to her in her past life. That would have been one more affair. Another ten year for nothingness. Thus, in spite of knowing the step harmful, she took that decision. Not only this, she never felt ashamed of showing her private parts to Gul, and that too in an open garden , before developing their friendship on conditional asking by Gul. Gul asked her before that, if she let him see her legs and he liked what he saw, she would surely take her to his bed. Ritu, being so bold and modern did it. They are passing their time like just live in relationship. Ritu says to Anjali that she has not yet though about their official marriage. She is adding that she has a wonderful time-and that's what matters. For her, Gul is unbelievable. She is enjoying her free sex relation with him.

Modern women are much interested in shaping their personal professional career and for that they are even ever ready to do it at the cost of their Motherhood. In this novel we can find that when Karuna's urine report is turned to the positive indication towards her pregnancy, and when she phones her sister, she tells her, "What am I supposed to do now? I don't want the bloody baby. I've never wanted one Krish's or anyone else's. I don't even know what women are supposed to do when they find themselves knocked up".<sup>213</sup>

Modern women's loneliness is also described over here. Despite of living with family members and friends, she feels lonely. When she is left alone, she feels directionless finds no way to move on. When Karuna is divorced by her husband due to her supposed pregnancy by Krish, she muemers herself, "I began worrying about the implications-where I'd live, and how I'd break the news to my parents. I didn't want to live, with them. And didn't want to move in with anyone else like Anjali. Would the husband grant me enough time to find alternative accommodation? And did I want to hang around his house till I found it?"<sup>216</sup> As Karuna is unemployed and has no money to survive her in the world, she feels helpless. Like modern women she comes under immediate despair and frustration. She thinks like women of her position in films do, she should move out. But at the same time she thinks as she doesn't have enough money, she can't do this. And for the first time, she could realize the difference between reality and dreams.

At the sometime woman like Anjali thinks that if any woman is in such condition should not think of false pride and dignity. She should not be fool while leaving her home must bring with her also she can bring or she is entitled.

Sobha De tries to reveal the reality of modern world. Here she shows that not only men but some modern women too are very smart at adultery. Anjali suggests Karuna that she should try an affair as an antidote. Ritu, her friend who had practiced flirting as an art, educated her about the rules laid down for adultery "no calls on Sundays, no calls at home, and letters to be destroyed immediately after reading.... No presents".<sup>171</sup> All the women in the novel are attractive, self assured and conscious of their plus points and are clever enough to hide their drawback like modern women. They are found happy with health, happy with the pleasures which they could buy with money and the new found freedom. Anjali

leaves behind her teenage daughter under her husband's care, allows her to take any man to bed, as long as she did it discreetly. The pretty, young wife was only another status symbol for him. Karuna did not want to have a baby, and seeks abortion when she gets pregnant, and later learns that she cannot conceive anymore. In the process of establishing her identity, she divorces her husband and takes up journalism as her career. Ranbir, her colleague, is interesting enough to have fun but not to live with. Finally, she ends up a loner who finds her evenings lonely in spite of her active participation in "Socialite Evenings".

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Shobha De constantly tries to shatter patriarchal hegemony and raises a voice against the male-dominance by presenting the concept of Modern Woman' – self confident, bold, sometimes believing in extra-marital relationship too, not husband or motherhood worshipper, always having quest for own identity, not so emotional, sometimes self- centered or self- conscious, feeling alien-lonely even though living in mass. We could find out here that perhaps these modern women are also not happy with their status and position in the society as the traditional women were. The modern women are no longer like Sita or Savitri. Perhaps, these mythological characters are illogical for them even though they perform religious rituals, that too through Brahmin on each concerned day. Their suffering seems suffocating. Sometimes they prefer to be silent but after reading the novel we may say that however they have been sailing in the boat, their sorrow has been increasing day by day. Even modern freedom and lifestyle cannot give them peaceful happy life. They always seem oppressed or stressed or frustrated or disgusted.

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